

A Letter from the Mayor about Treehouses and Other Things...

From time to time I have used this page to comment on matters of interest here in the Village. Today, I'm writing about something you may have heard about or read about in the news – a treehouse a Village resident decided to erect in his yard. At first blush this may seem like no big deal. Why should the Village care to interfere with a homeowner's right to build his kids a treehouse in his own yard? Well, that's what I thought at first too.

To begin with, this all started with complaints to my office from the homeowner's own neighbors. They complained this was no ordinary treehouse tucked away in someone's backyard. They explained it was nearly 100 square feet. The treehouse had sidewalls, a pitched roof and electric, and that the homeowner built the treehouse nearly on the property line along a residential street.

I referred the neighbors' complaints to our Building Inspector who, by the way, is also a licensed architect. He advised me that pursuant to State law and the Village Code the homeowner would need to obtain a building permit. This means he would have to submit plans to assure the treehouse was properly built and show the treehouse complied with local zoning.

The Building Inspector commented to me our laws in the Village are no different than anywhere else. Structures like this treehouse require a building permit to make sure they are safe, not a fire hazard and that they don't unfairly impact the privacy and other rights of the homeowner's neighbors. This seemed reasonable to me.

In any event, the problem snowballed because the homeowner refused to comply and go through the process to legalize the structure. Summons were issued. The homeowner decided rather than apply for a permit he would challenge the summonses in court. He demanded a trial. Well, after having a fair opportunity to be heard, the homeowner lost. The Court told the homeowner he had to follow the same rules as everyone else. Instead, the homeowner went to the media to pressure the Village to change its position. To date, the homeowner has not applied to legalize the treehouse.

I've read that people say this is all about taxes – it's not. Someone could get hurt. Then, you guessed it, the Village could get sued and you, the taxpayers, would pay. I want you to know for the Village reasonable compliance with the law is not an option. We are legally and morally obligated to treat everyone the same.

The homeowner chose to build this treehouse without getting the proper permit. It is now up to him to try to make it right.

Best wishes for the Holiday Season.

Cordially,

Mayor Ralph Scordino

